

Message Text

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TO USDEL ASWAN IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 056961

EXDIS TOSEC 470

FOLLOWING REPEAT LISBON 1398 SENT SECSTATE INFO BONN LONDON
LOURENCO MARQUES LUANDA MADRID PARIS RABAT NATO DIA USCINCEUR
OPORTO BY POUCH PONTA DELGADA BY POUCH DATED MAR 13.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 1398

EXDIS

DEPT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PINT, PO

SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE COUP: ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

REF: LISBON 1333 (NOTAL)

1. FAILURE OF MARCH 11 COUP WILL DISMEMBER THE EXTREME
RIGHT AND SERIOUSLY WEAKEN THE MODERATE CENTER IN PORTUGAL.
IT WAS MAINLY MILITARY ULTRAS WHO LAUNCHED THE ABORTIVE
EFFORT, BUT RADICALS IN THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT (AFM)
CAN BE EXPECTED TO USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REMOVE OR NEUTRALIZE
MODERATE MILITARY OFFICERS FROM POSITIONS OF POWER. THIS IS
BEGINNING TO HAPPEN WITH ANNOUNCEMENT OF ARREST OF SOME MODERATE
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SPINOLA SUPPORTERS (LISBON 1350).

2. NOBODY KNOWS YET HOW MUCH MORE POWER WILL ACCRUE TO THE AFM RADICALS IN THE WAKE OF THIS LATEST RIGHTIST FIASCO. MY JUDGEMENT IS THAT THE AFM RADICALS WILL SCORE MASSIVE, BUT HOPEFULLY NOT DECISIVE, GAINS. AT THE MINIMUM WE CAN EXPECT THE MILITARY TO ARROGATE GREATER POWERS TO ITSELF AND, WITHIN THE MILITARY, THESE POWERS WILL BE CENTERED IN THE AFM. THE PERSONAL POSITIONS OF OTELO AND VASCO GONCALVES HAVE PROBABLY BEEN MOST STRENGTHENED. BOTH ARE AT BEST SUSCEPTIBLE TO COMMUNIST INFLUENCE.

3. THE CIVILIAN POLITICAL PARTIES, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE COMMUNISTS, HAVE ALL BEEN WOUNDED, PERHAPS FATALLY. MOST PORTUGUESE MILITARY, REGARDLESS OF OTHER DIFFERENCES, HAVE BEEN UNEASY WITH THE COUNTRY'S NASCENT POLITICAL LIFE TO WHICH THEY WERE COMPLETELY UNACCUSTOMED.

(A) MAJOR CENTER-RIGHT PARTIES (CDS, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS) WILL PROBABLY BE FORMALLY BANNED BEFORE THE SCHEDULED APRIL 12 ELECTION. CENTER-LEFT POPULAR DEMOCRATS (PPD) ARE NOW BEING SMEARED AS "FASCIST" AND THEIR FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN. THAT WOULD LEAVE ONLY SOARES' SOCIALISTS AND THE COMMUNISTS, PLUS SOME MINOR PARTIES TO THE LEFT OF THE COMMUNISTS. WITH THIS SITUATION, CHANCES OF HOLDING MEANINGFUL ELECTIONS NEXT MONTH ARE SLIGHT, ALTHOUGH THE FORMAL PROCESS MAY STILL TAKE PLACE. PCP IS GLEEFULLY HOLDING LISBON RALLY TONIGHT TO ANNOUNCE THEIR CANDIDATES.

(B) THE POSITION OF THE SOCIALISTS IS NOW EXPECIALLY PRECARIOUS. WITH THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM NARROWING TO THE LEFT, EVEN THEY COULD BE CANDIDATES FOR THE "FASCIST" LABEL. THEY KNOW THIS AND ARE STRUGGLING TO AVOID THE STIGMA BY HOLDING DISCUSSIONS ON POSSIBLE COOPERATION WITH CUNHAL'S COMMUNISTS. THESE DISCUSSIONS, HOWEVER, ARE BOUND TO BE A DIALOGUE OF THE DEAF. MY CONVERSATION WITH SOARES (LISBON 1397) TENDS TO CONFIRM GLOOMY OUTLOOK FOR PSP.

(C) CUNHAL'S CURRENT TACTIC IS TO STAY AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE AFM WHILE CONTINUALLY EDGING THEM IN HIS DIRECTION. HIS MARCH 12 CENTRAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT IS EXPLICIT ABOUT MAJOR COMMUNIST TASKS FOR THE NEXT STAGE: PURGE OF STATE ADMINISTRATION, CIVILIAN AND MILITARY; AND "REORGANIZATION" OF PARAMILITARY FORCES. AT THE SAME TIME, CUNHAL HAS TO BE CONFIDENTIAL

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CERNED THAT AFM RADICALS COULD DECIDE THEY NO LONGER NEED SUPPORT PCP HAS PROVIDED. HE MUST ALSO CONTINUE TO WORRY ABOUT SPLINTER GROUPS TO HIS LEFT.

4. IF THIS ANALYSIS HAS VALIDITY, THEN ABORTIVE COUP OF MARCH 11 HAS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED THE LIKELIHOOD THAT PORTUGAL IS MOVING TOWARDS OVERT MILITARY RULE. SUCH RULE WILL PROBABLY BE BASED ON POPULIST AND NATIONALIST POLICIES

WITH HEAVY PRO-COMMUNIST OVERTONES. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT IS LIKELY TO BE SOUGHT IN THE "THIRD WORLD" AND NATO TIES, AT MINIMUM, DE-EMPHASIZED.

5. I REALIZE THIS IS A BLEAK SCENARIO. AT THE SAME TIME, I DO NOT BELIEVE THE SITUATION IS IRRETRIEVABLE. POSITIVE FACTORS ARE FEW, BUT SHOULD NOT BE TOTALLY DISCOUNTED: WITH SPINOLA'S DEPARTURE, PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES PROBABLY WILL LOSE HIS PRINCIPAL RIVAL FOR LEADERSHIP OF CENTER FORCES WITHIN PORTUGUESE MILITARY, GRAVELY WEAKENED AS THESE FORCES MAY BE. COSTA GOMES IS NO CHARGER, BUT HE IS A SURE-FOOTED, RESPECTED LEADER WHO WILL COUNSEL MODERATION. HE MAY BE ABLE TO START BACK ON THE LONG UPHILL CLIMB, DESPITE HEAVY ODDS AGAINST HIM.

6. I BELIEVE U.S. POLICY AT THE PRESENT JUNCTURE SHOULD CENTER ON DOING ALL WE CAN TO LIMIT THE INEVITABLE LEFTWARD SHIFT. THIS WILL BE A DIFFICULT AND GRADUAL PROCESS. WE HAVE LOST A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CREDIBILITY BY WARNINGS OF A COMMUNIST-LED COUP WHEN, IN FACT, THE COUP EMANATED FROM THE FAR RIGHT. CHARGES OF USG COMPLICITY ARE WIDELY BELIEVED.

7. NONETHELESS, WE HAVE MEANS AT OUR DISPOSAL. THERE IS RESPECT AND RESIDUAL GOOD WILL FOR USG IN MANY CIRCLES, ALTHOUGH THEIR VOICES HAVE BEEN MUTED. THE POPULATION IS STILL CONSERVATIVE AND THE BULK OF MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE STILL NOT BEEN RADICALIZED. DEPARTMENT'S REAFFIRMATION OF CONTINUANCE OF OUR AID PROGRAM IS MOST HELPFUL, SINCE THIS HAS BEEN OUR MOST USEFUL TOOL TO DATE. WE WILL NEED ALL THE LEVERS WE CAN PUT OUR HANDS ON IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD.
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